

## Maintaining Your Neighborhood Association

The importance of qualified leadership is often overlooked as a neighborhood association develops. Strong leadership gives an organization:

- Guidance
- Stability
- Continuity from year to year
- Motivation to take action
- Unity of purpose

A part of your job as a neighborhood organizer is to identify and develop leaders. The task of recruiting and developing leaders has to be an ongoing activity through the lifetime of your neighborhood association. When identifying new leaders for your organization, look for individuals who have shown that they:

- Want to succeed and want their group to succeed
- Communicate well with people
- Can motivate people to take collective action
- Are knowledgeable about the neighborhood, its people and their interests
- Have an allegiance to the neighborhood and the association
- Know how to share power

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### Developing a Neighborhood Plan

If a neighborhood is viewed as a permanent home for families and as a continuing investment for their money, then steps need to be taken to address changes that will occur. A neighborhood plan is a guide that provides a framework for present and future decision making. The health and vitality of a neighborhood depends on the ability of its residents to plan for its future. A Neighborhood Plan is developed by a group of organized neighbors referred to as a neighborhood association. A neighborhood plan contains broad statements about what the residents would like to have happen (goals) and principles they would like to see followed (policies). It also contains suggestions for strategies on how to reach goals.

### One-Year Neighborhood Plan Development Guideline:

- Identify one to three issues that are of major concern to the neighborhood
- Form a committee for each issue to spearhead the drive to resolve the issue
- Identify available resources that can be utilized to assist the committee
- Identify strategies and goals
- Implement strategies

**Tip:** Always keep a written record of your plan and ongoing assignments. This will provide guidance for your association.

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### Committee Work

Organizations accomplish their objectives through the dedicated work of committees. The tasks and the types of committees depend on the overall purpose and structure of your neighborhood association. The types of committees can generally be divided into two major categories:

## Internal Affairs

- Fund-raising/finance
- Meeting Arrangements
- Communications/Publicity
- Bylaws
- Social Events

## Neighborhood Affairs

- Housing Conditions
- Police-Neighborhood Relations
- Economic Development
- Neighborhood Maintenance
- Community Services and Resources
- Traffic Safety

**Tip:** To maintain active, productive, motivated members on the committees

- Encourage members to participate in the association and the committee planning process.
- Define and discuss the goals and objectives of the committee.
- Provide reasons for the actions to be considered by the committee and the neighborhood association.
- Give recognition to members and committees who have contributed to the advancement of the neighborhood association.
- Make meeting time and committee work as productive as possible. No one wants to feel they are wasting time.
- Help members develop communication skills.

You'll be planning a lot of great programs in your neighborhood - don't keep them a secret. Spread the words. This will help others in the neighborhood join in the effort and take part in making a difference. Here are a few ways to get the word out:

- Neighborhood association newsletter
- Weekly area newspapers
- Schools, churches and club newsletters
- Door-to-door handouts
- Neighborhood Survey:
  - Mail
  - Phone
  - Door-to-door
  - Person-to-person by phone:
    - To friends
    - To neighbors
- Bulletins, notices, pamphlets, posters, fliers placed with permission in:
  - Laundromats
  - Libraries
  - Supermarkets
  - Local restaurants
  - Stores

- Waiting rooms in dentist/doctor's offices
  - Booths at local events
- Speakers at:
  - Business groups
  - Service clubs
  - Youth groups
  - Schools/churches
- Cooperative efforts with adjoining neighborhoods
  - Lawn signs
  - Letters
  - Telephone tree

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**Unproductive Association or Committee --Look for the following conditions:**

- The committee may be stuck in the discussion phase and need to move forward with task assignments
- The goals may be too large
- Fear of the possible results
- Conflicting loyalties of some members
- Interpersonal Conflicts
- Poor leadership
- Rigid decision-making methods
- Not allowing open discussion
- Failure to follow the bylaws and or not applying them in a consistent manner. When such problems occur, encourage open, respectful discussion. Let the members try to identify the obstacles in their own way.

**Understanding and Managing Conflict:**

One of the primary benefits of forming a neighborhood association is the improvement in communications between neighbors. However, there will be times, in spite of our best efforts, when communication will break down, and a conflict will develop.

A simple unresolved conflict can escalate and cause serious damage to relationships and to a neighborhood association, so it is very important that neighbors do their best to handle these situations constructively.

Remember that conflict in and of itself is not bad and can lead to the discovery of valuable new insights.

One of the biggest obstacles to managing conflict well is that most of us find conflict to be very uncomfortable. As a result, we either try to avoid dealing with it, or we approach the conflict as if we were going to battle, determined to "win."

There is, however, another approach to this common dilemma, one that accepts conflict as a normal aspect of any relationship or organization. Seen in this light, one can approach conflict resolution as an opportunity for growth, change and new understandings.

**Consider using the following tips the next time you are faced with the challenge of effectively resolving conflict:**

- **Talk directly.**  
Direct conversation is much more effective than sending a letter, banging on the wall, throwing a rock or complaining to everyone else.
- **Choose a good time.**  
Try to talk in a quiet place where you can both be comfortable and undisturbed for as long as the discussion takes. Don't approach the other person as he or she is leaving for work or after you've had a terrible day.
- **Plan ahead.**  
Plan out what you want to say ahead of time. State clearly what the problem is and how it affects you.
- **Don't blame or name call.**  
Antagonizing the other person only makes it harder for her or him to hear you.
- **Give information.**  
Don't judge or interpret the other person's behavior. Instead, give information about your own situation and feelings and how the person's behavior affects you.
- **Listen.**  
Give the other person a chance to tell his or her side of the conflict completely. Relax and listen; try to learn how the other person feels.
- **Show that you are listening.**  
Although you may not agree with what is being said, tell the other person that you hear her or him and are glad that you are discussing the problem together.
- **Talk it all through.**  
Get all the issues and feeling out into the open. Don't leave out the part that seems too difficult to discuss.
- **Work on a joint solution.**  
Two or more people cooperating are much more effective than one person telling another to change. Be specific. "I will turn my music off at midnight: is better than "I won't play loud music any more."
- **Follow through.**  
Agree to check with each other at specific times to make sure that the agreement is still working.

In some circumstances, you may also wish to seek the assistance of a trained mediator. A mediator is a neutral third party who will listen to the issues and assist the neighbors in conflict to create their own mutually acceptable solution to the problem

## **How Associations Grow**

*Your Association Will Grow When You:*

- Set goals and keep the process moving to make your neighborhood a better place to live.

- Continue to motivate your neighbors to be involved in the association's goal setting and completion of projects and social events.
- Use the resources available through your ONR Neighborhood Program Coordinator to obtain speakers for meetings.
- Keep communications open to all neighbors through newsletters, flyers and websites.
- Get involved in County government. Become a part of one of the County's decision-making boards or committees.
- Register your organization in the registry to receive notices of planned development.
- Participate in Community Based Planning when it comes to your area.

### **Remember:**

Your Neighborhood Program Coordinator is available to attend your meetings, lend a helping hand, help you with designing a newsletter, flyers and other notices, direct you to resources and information, and make initial contacts with County officials and departments.

### **Components of a Successful Neighborhood Association**

The following are some basic building blocks in creating and maintaining a solid foundation for a neighborhood association. These steps are not meant to be all-inclusive, but an outline of the basics.

#### **Clear Goals & Objectives**

Goals and objectives provide a road map for associations and give them a reason to exist.

Clearly defined goals promote communication and provide members with direction and a sense of accomplishment. Goals and objectives need to be realistic and attainable for the members.

#### **Written Operating Procedures**

To ensure continuity from year to year, especially when officers and leaders change, your association needs to have written operating procedures and policies. These written procedures can take many forms. The most common operating documents are bylaws. There are instructions on what to include in appendix X. Your association does not have to be incorporated to adopt bylaws. The written procedures should address the purpose of the association, the boundaries it serves, titles and duties of your groups leadership, when and how leaders are selected, frequency of meetings, voting procedures, definition of membership, etc.

#### **Democratic Process Of Leadership/Officer Elections**

Members should have a voice in the leadership of the association. Through the election of officers/leadership, members are able to participate in the development and direction of the association. Election of officers also helps to promote officer/leadership accountability to the members.

#### **Solid Leadership**

Assuming a leadership position with a neighborhood association is not to be taken lightly. A leader is in the position of impacting the association and the neighborhood for years.

According to Milton Doheny, 1995 President of Neighborhoods USA, "good leadership is shared leadership." A neighborhood leader needs to have the vision and the ability to build consensus, to delegate duties and authority to others, to encourage neighbor involvement and maximize neighborhood talent. A leader needs to help the association cultivate future leaders for the association. A good leader knows how important it is for the association to experience a change in leadership.

### **Committees**

Shared leadership is healthy for a neighborhood association. Committees are the basic operating tools for associations. Committees allow the neighborhood leadership to delegate issues (identify and research problems and solutions) and meet its goals by involving a number of members. Many associations have standing committees, which operate continually, addressing key issues, such as newsletter and communication, welcome, safety, social functions, etc. Special committees and/or task forces may be created to address short term issues. Special committees and/or task forces are dissolved after the issue has been addressed to the satisfaction of the members.

### **Neighbor Input and Involvement**

A neighborhood association is only as strong as its weakest member. The key to a vital and active association is members - neighbors involved in their association. A neighborhood association serves as the foundation to bring neighbors together to address neighborhood issues, promote team building, and serve as a vehicle for neighbors to pool their resources and maintain the integrity of their neighborhood. Associations help promote the self-help tradition and empower neighbors.

### **Maintaining Member Interest In Your Neighborhood Association**

Keeping the interest and involvement of neighbors in their association is a continual challenge faced by every neighborhood group. Here are some pointers and ideas that may stimulate other ideas.

- 1.** Be realistic in your expectation of the members. Neighbors have to work and have other priorities that may limit their participation.
- 2.** Stay focused on a few well-defined goals or projects. Too many projects may frustrate or dilute your volunteer resources.
- 3.** Be sure to set attainable and realistic goals, which include a time line and identify individual and/or committee responsibilities.
- 4.** Celebrate your successes, even if it means doing it one step at a time.
- 5.** Be sure to publicly recognize members for their efforts and accomplishments. Recognize efforts in your newsletter.
- 6.** Try to incorporate "fun" into your meetings or projects. Humor helps too!
- 7.** Ask specific neighbors for help or their involvement. Sometimes all it takes is asking a neighbor to do something. They may be willing if asked, but may not volunteer or speak up when an "all call" for help is issued.
- 8.** Find out what is important to your member(s) and try to get them involved in committees or projects involving their interest.
- 9.** Delegate important tasks and assignments.
- 10.** Ask neighbors what their concerns are and respond quickly to those issues when and if possible.
- 11.** Anytime a hot issue comes up, call as many neighbors as possible to ask their opinions.
- 12.** Create a buddy system or "neighbor mentor" to make newcomers feel more welcome and important to the association.
- 13.** Have the president or another board member personally visit all new members to encourage their involvement.
- 14.** Publicize your association meetings well in advance; including what will be on the agenda.
- 15.** Start and finish meetings on time. Respect the time and commitment of members attending the meeting.
- 16.** Keep meetings on track and to the point. Summarize the results of decisions and actions at the end of the meeting so that members leave with a sense of accomplishment.
- 17.** Be creative with your meetings, maybe ask neighbors to share what they do for a living. So often neighbors have no idea what each does for a living. Promote using the businesses and services of neighbors with no perks attached or expected discounts for services, etc.

- 18.** Publish a newsletter to keep the neighborhood informed and focused. Include a classified section for neighbors to promote their businesses or sell items.
- 19.** Meetings are not the only way to bring neighbors together. Organize a social function by delegating the event to a special committee.
- 20.** Sponsor clean-up days, possible taking one street at a time so that the clean-up seems manageable and can be accomplished in the morning.
- 21.** Respond to concerns and questions as quickly as possible.
- 22.** Involve the youth in the neighborhood in activities and events. Many times, kids are able to get their parents involved easier than the association.
- 23.** Provide useful and meaningful information at your meeting. Contact your Office of Neighborhood Coordination for information on County services useful to your neighborhood.
- 24.** Always thank members for their participation and leadership, including showing appreciation to committee chairs and members.
- 25.** Listen to what members are saying. Often, all a member may want is for someone to listen.
- 26.** The president and/or board should delegate authority and be supportive. Let the committees do their jobs. Respect their decisions.
- 27.** Create a telephone chain or communication system that makes it possible for the association to keep its members informed.
- 28.** Volunteers always appreciate Incentives and rewards. Some examples are: recognizing and thanking a specific person or persons at a general meeting; acknowledging someone's efforts in your newsletter; or neighbors' cooking dinner or cake/cookies for someone. Incentives and rewards don't have to cost a lot. Use your imagination and creativity.

**Together, you and your neighbors make life better on the street where you live.**

